

# Making Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps more inclusive

## Executive Summary of the Desk Research

Contribution of the Inclusion and Diversity  
Strategy in the frame of the interim evaluation  
of the programmes period 2021-2027

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# INTRODUCTION

## Purpose and methodology

This desk research, steered by [SALTO Inclusion & Diversity Resource Centre](#) (SALTO I&D), aims to contribute to enhancing inclusion and diversity in the European youth programmes, namely [Erasmus+](#) (youth) and [European Solidarity Corps](#). This process includes analysing past successes and ongoing challenges based on collected materials from the current generation of programmes (2021-2027), the interim evaluation of Erasmus+ (2014-2020), as well as the first years of the European Solidarity Corps (2018-2020). The desk research supports identifying their strengths and weaknesses and compiling lessons learnt and successes to enhance inclusion and diversity in future European youth programmes, beyond 2027.

The analysis is based on three key documents:

- [The Inclusion and Diversity Strategy](#), emphasises equitable access to the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes for all individuals, with a specific focus on addressing barriers faced by those with fewer opportunities. It also focuses on the promotion of diversity as a valuable source of learning.
- [The European Commission Framework of Inclusion Measures](#) is aimed at facilitating access to the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes for young people with fewer opportunities, removing obstacles preventing access and providing a basis for implementation guidance.
- [The Inclusion and Diversity Roadmap](#) details the steps and areas of intervention needed to implement the Inclusion & Diversity Strategy for the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes.

In addition to these documents, the desk research also looked at other materials, including support documents from National Agencies (NAs) and beneficiary organisations, reports of activities, position papers, analysis of synergies with other strategies, and diverse multimedia resources, which have informed the preliminary findings and further contribute to focus groups, interviews, and surveys for a final research report.

It is important to note, however, that the desk research does not claim to be a comprehensive analysis of all inclusion and diversity projects and initiatives launched since 2021.

## HISTORICAL INSIGHTS AND EVOLVING STRATEGIES

An overview of the past, particularly the mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme (2014-2020), shed light on structural, operational, and financial barriers to inclusion such as linguistic challenges, financial and budgetary difficulties, and complex application processes, primarily affecting young people with fewer opportunities (YPWFOs). With 30% of learners from 2014 to 2016 being YPWFOs or facing complex situations and despite a significant progress in reaching disadvantaged groups, a considerable gap remained, requiring a much more tailored and targeted support as well as flexible funding measures and mechanisms, which all led to an increased emphasis on inclusion and diversity today.

In terms of processes and strategic documents, it is worth underlining the vision document "ID Beyond: Inclusion & Diversity in the EU youth programmes beyond 2020" and the report "How to make the European youth programmes more inclusive", which have been important in shaping future strategic steps. These documents highlight the need for a holistic approach to inclusion, enhanced IT tools, targeted support for YPWFOs, and the development of comprehensive guidelines and resources for inclusion. In parallel, a position paper by CARITAS and other Civil Society Organisations further underlined the importance of involving YPWFOs in the programme planning, implementation, and evaluation, providing structured information and using accessible programme documents to enhance inclusion transversely, in various areas of youth work and education.

# MAIN INSIGHTS

## Erasmus+ Programme (2014-2020 and 2021-2027)

### Key findings

**An increased focus on inclusion:** the mid-term evaluation (2014-2020) identified significant barriers to inclusion, such as financial difficulties, complex application processes, and limited support for small-scale initiatives. The programme, although effective in reaching a wider audience, showed gaps in adequately addressing disadvantaged groups. Nonetheless, since the introduction of the new Inclusion and Diversity Strategy, a noticeable increase in efforts to prioritise inclusion has been observed across various agendas of the Erasmus+ programme.

**The effectiveness of SALTO Inclusion & Diversity (I&D):** the 2022 assessment by ECORYS highlighted the overall effectiveness of SALTO I&D in promoting inclusion and diversity within Erasmus+, though highlighting remaining areas for improvements.

### Challenges

**A continuous call for adjustments:** despite the progress made, there are ongoing needs for enhanced outreach efforts, efficient and simpler application procedures, tailored support mechanisms, flexibility in budget allocation, improved access to information, and caution when handling or creating labels such as 'young people with fewer opportunities' (YPWFOs). New actions such as Discover EU Inclusion also call for rapid and significant adjustments to reach their objectives.

**Interconnection of inclusion and diversity, and other priorities:** new programmes' and (policy-)related priorities such as digital transformation and green transition require innovative approaches to address social inclusion, underlining the need for more cohesive, systemic, and holistic approaches to these dimensions.

### Successes

**Collaboration among the SALTO Resource Centres:** collaborative efforts among various Resource Centres, such as SALTO Participation and Information and SALTO European Solidarity Corps, demonstrate a joined approach to inclusion and diversity, with overlapping areas of emphasis linked to the Inclusion and Diversity Strategy.

**Support to National Agencies and organisations and practical examples and training initiatives:** tools like the ID Temperature Check, the development of Inclusion and Diversity Officer roles, and strategic resources such as the Cookbook for Inclusion, aimed at enhancing the capacity of National Agencies (NAs) and organisations in promoting inclusion. Initiatives like ID Talks, the Inclusion toolkit, and Inclusion Training for Trainers (among many others) have provided organisations with practical examples of

inclusive projects, reinforcing the relevance of the Inclusion and Diversity Strategy. As another example, the "Mentoring and Coaching within the European Solidarity Corps" focuses on enhancing quality mentoring practices and promotes an inclusive community of mentors (and coaches).

### Areas for improvement and innovation

**Greater participation of YPWFOs:** there is (still) an urgent need for increased collaboration with [grassroots] organisations and for an in-depth exploration of additional dimensions of inclusion and diversity to ensure greater participation of YPWFOs in the programmes.

**Responding to new and evolving challenges:** the emergence of new challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, the refugee crisis, mental health issues, and climate-change-related anxiety stresses the need for a rapid adaptation of the European youth programmes to address these evolving challenges, especially affecting YPWFOs and disadvantaged communities.

### Main conclusions

The Erasmus+ programme has made **significant progress** in integrating and prioritising inclusion and diversity. However, it keeps on **facing ongoing challenges** in fully meeting the needs of disadvantaged groups, requiring continuous innovation and adaptation, flexibility, easier and smoother applications, and project management procedures. New initiatives or actions such as Discover EU Inclusion ought to match the needs and the reality of the target groups they aim to focus on.

The **interconnection of inclusion with other societal and global issues** requires a broader and multi-dimensional approach, integrating perspectives from various fields to effectively address the nature and purpose of inclusion and diversity.

**Collaborative efforts among various SALTO Resource Centres** and other stakeholders are crucial for sustaining and enhancing the impact of inclusion and diversity initiatives within the programme. Those already existing need to be sustained and space for more innovative collaboration needs to be created.

**Future strategies should focus on addressing new and emerging challenges** while ensuring the participation and support of all stakeholders, particularly young people with fewer opportunities.

# European Solidarity Corps Programme (2021-2027)

## Key findings

The SALTO European Solidarity Corps developed a **strategy** with a focus on quality implementation of the programme, and on building a community of practice. One of the key objectives is to contribute to the priority of inclusion.

Initiatives such as the **Quality Standards in the European Solidarity Corps** highlight the importance of diversity, inclusion, and equal opportunities in activities, regardless of cultural, religious, gender, sexual orientation, ability, or socio-economic status.

Guidelines for **'Labelling in the Beneficiary Model'** were developed to focus on labels and terms, ensuring they are used effectively to support structural barriers rather than generalise groups, simplifying administration for beneficiaries.

## Challenges

**Continuous calls for programme adjustments:** ss for Erasmus+, there are needs for an enhanced outreach, efficient application procedures, tailored support mechanisms, flexibility in budget allocation, improved access to information, and caution with handling labels such as "young people with fewer opportunities". All the above seems to be significantly stronger and more urgently needed in the European Solidarity Corps, compared to adjustments already made within and for Erasmus+.

The programme, as it stands now, **struggles to reach its objectives of inclusion and diversity**, and Erasmus+, calls for efficient and simpler application procedures, tailored support mechanisms, flexibility in budget allocation, and improved access to information.

## Successes

**Collaborative strategies:** the integration of new strategies and policies since 2021, with joined efforts among several SALTO Resource Centres to establish common approaches and joined support resources, has fostered a more unified and interconnected approach to inclusion and diversity.

**Effectiveness of SALTO I&D:** the 2022 assessment by ECORYS highlighted the effectiveness of SALTO I&D in promoting inclusion and diversity within the European Solidarity Corps, reinforcing the relevance of the Inclusion & Diversity Strategy.

## Examples of innovative projects and tools

Initiatives such as the **Europe Talks Solidarity**, and its support publications, address issues related to inclusion, like systemic discrimination and sustainable solidarity.

The **NET Matrix**, developed by the SALTO European Solidarity Corps for National Agencies and other SALTO Resource Centres, analyses the programme 'coverage', identifying gaps or missing areas, with a special focus on inclusion.

### Areas for improvement and innovation

**Increase the participation of YPWFOs:** as for Erasmus+, there is a remaining need for more collaboration with [grassroots] organisations and for the exploration of additional dimensions of inclusion to enhance the participation of YPWFOs.

**Responding to new and evolving challenges:** similar to Erasmus+, the programme needs to adapt and more rapidly adjust to challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic, global conflicts, refugee crises, and mental health issues, which particularly affect disadvantaged communities.

### Main Conclusions

The European Solidarity Corps has made **significant steps in embedding inclusion and diversity** within its strategic framework. However, **continuous changes are needed** to address persistent and emerging challenges, those changes being the need for efficient and simpler application procedures, tailored support mechanisms, flexibility in budget allocation, and improved access to user-friendly [and representative] information. The programme in its current format can hardly reach its inclusion and diversity objective.

The **interrelation of inclusion with broader societal issues** requires innovative and multi-dimensional approaches. The integration of these approaches across the SALTO Resource Centres and National Agencies demonstrates the programme's commitment to a holistic view of inclusion and diversity.

Future strategies should focus on **improving participation opportunities for YPWFOs and adapting to rapidly changing global contexts**. This includes addressing digital transformation, mental health, and environmental challenges while maintaining a strong emphasis on diversity and inclusion.

## Other collaborative efforts and synergies

### SALTO Resource Centres

- SALTO Resource Centres, such as SALTO Participation and Information (PI) and SALTO European Solidarity Corps, have developed strategies that complement the Inclusion and Diversity Strategy. These centres collaborate to establish common approaches and support resources, addressing challenges like digital transformation and its impact on social inclusion.

- The Youthpass Strategy, coordinated by SALTO Training and Cooperation, focuses on enhancing the visibility of learning in the youth field, with special attention to supporting YPWFOs.

#### Eurodesk and ERYICA contributions

- Eurodesk's position paper and guide for inclusive digital communication play a crucial role in ensuring inclusive access to youth information and EU (youth) programmes.
- ERYICA's European Youth Information Charter and the Quality Label assess structures based on principles of inclusion and accessibility, addressing the information needs of young refugees.

## FIRST CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

“Can do better”!

The desk research underlines significant progress in addressing and fostering inclusion within the Erasmus+ (youth) and European Solidarity Corps programmes, though challenges seem to persist while new ones emerge. Continuous efforts are required to address those ongoing challenges, which include the need for better outreach, simplified application processes, tailored support measures and mechanisms, and much-improved access to information, among others.

The emergence of new programmes and policy-related priorities requires innovative and adjusted approaches, as well as bigger institutional accountability to align their inclusion and diversity policies with the expected goals. The ongoing challenging evolution of political, environmental, and socio-economic contexts creates significant obstacles to inclusion, requiring continuous systemic efforts and creativity from all stakeholders, to cater for the diverse needs of young people across Europe, especially those with fewer opportunities or at risk of exclusion and marginalisation.